

Message Text

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S E C R E T AMMAN 0894

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR JO SY EG PLO LE XF

SUBJECT: TALK WITH RIFAI--SYRIA, LEBANON, AND PLO

1. SUMMARY. RIFAI BELIEVES SYRIA IS DETERMINED TO KEEP PEACE IN LEBANON IN ORDER TO AVOID RESURGENCE OF FIGHTING THERE FROM PROBOKING ANOTHER ARAB-ISRAELI WAR. PRIME REQUIREMENTS ARE TO DISARM COMBATANTS AND ESPECIALLY TO CONTROL HEAVY WEAPONS IN FATAH CAMPS. SYRIA PREPARED TO USE SAIQA AND PLA TO CARRY OUT DISARMING OPERATION OF FATAH FAILS. ASAD, RIFAI SAYS, BELIEVES NEW BLOW-UP IN LEBANON MAY COME BETWEEN SAIQA/PLA AND FATAH OVER ATTEMPT TO CONTROL FATAH CAMPS' HEAVY WEAPONS. MEANWHILE, SYRIAN WANTS TO RID PLO OF IRAQI AND LIBYAN INFLUENCE. THEY BELIEVE ARAFAT IS WEAK ENOUGH TO BEND TO THESE EFFORTS. EGYPTIANS SEE SIMILAR HANDWRITING ON WALL, ACCORDING TO RIFAI, AND THUS SEEM TO BE PUSHING THEIR OWN FAVORITE--SALAH KALAF (ABU IYAD). RIFAI THINKS EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN CONTROVERSY NOW WILL FOCUS EVEN MORE ON THIS COMPETITION FOR INFLUENCE ON PLO. END SUMMARY.

2. ON FEBRUARY 19 I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO TALK WITH RIFAI ABOUT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE AREA.

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3. HE SAID THAT THE EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN CONTROVERSY IS

NOW FOCUSING IN ON THE PLO. IN BEIRUT AND ELSEWHERE IN LEBANON, THE SYRIANS HAVE TOLD JORDANIANS THEY ARE DETERMINED TO KEEP THE PEACE AND IMPLEMENT THE CAIRO AGREEMENTS. IN PARTICULAR, THEY ARE DETERMINED TO REMOVE MOST OF THE HEAVY WEAPONS FROM THE CAMPS. IF FATAH FAILS TO DO THIS, THE SYRIANS SAY THEY ARE READY TO USE THE PLA AND SAIQA AGAINST FATAH TO DO SO. RIFAI WAS CAGEY WHEN I ASKED HIM IF THE SYRIAN OBJECTIVE WAS FULL CONTROL OVER THE PLO. HE SAID THAT SYRIA STARTS FROM THE PREMISE THEY DO NOT WANT WAR WITH ISRAEL NOW AND THAT LEBANON HOLDS STILL THE DANGER OF PROVOKING SUCH A CONFLICT. THE HEAVY WEAPONS IN THE CAMPS ARE A BIG PART OF THE PROBLEM. WITHOUT THEM FATAH WILL BEHAVE AND THE SITUATION IN LEBANON CAN BE CONTAINED.

4. WHEN I PRESSED HIM ON THE POINT, HE SAID THAT THE SYRIANS REALLY SEEM TO THINK LESS OF THE PLO THAN WE DO. THEY WILL PROBABLY TRY TO PUSH THEIR OWN PEOPLE IN TO STAY ON TOP OF THE ORGANIZATION. ARAFAT IS NOT REALLY STRONG AND WILL BEND THEIR WAY. THE EGYPTIANS SEE THIS AND HAVE PROBABLY GIVEN UP ON ARAFAT. EGYPT NOW SEEMS TO HAVE FOUND IN SALAH KALAF (ABU IYAD) SOMEONE WHO IS AMBITIOUS AND WILL WORK WITH THEM. THEY ARE PUSHING HIM FORWARD. SYRIA IN THE MEANWHILE WOULD LIKE ALSO TO CLEANSE THE PLO, IF IT COULD, OF IRAQI AND LIBYAN INFLUENCE. PRIVATELY, THE SYRIANS ARE VERY DISPARAGING ABOUT THE PLO. AND RIFAI SAYS THE NEXT BLOW-UP IN LEBANON MAY COME OVER A BATTLE BETWEEN THE PLA/SAIQA ON THE ONE HAND AND FATAH ON THE OTHER OVER THE HEAVY WEAPONS IN THE CAMPS.
PICKERING

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